

RECRUITING AND RETENTION OF VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

The Town of Canton Connecticut has been protected by all-volunteer fire departments for at least one hundred and fifty years. For the vast majority of this time these departments have enjoyed what seemed like an endless manpower pool from which to draw volunteers. This scenario existed up until the early 1980s when the number of new firefighters attracted to the Town's volunteer fire departments decreased substantially.

The purpose of this research paper is to actually conduct the research portion of recommendation #21 of the *Town of Canton (Connecticut) Final Report Relating to Fire Services* study. Recommendation #21 states, “ *The Town of Canton Fire and Rescue Department should research, develop, and maintain a reasonable, workable, recruitment and retention program.*”

The research methods utilized for this research project were historical, descriptive, and evaluative in nature. The writings of fire service experts and other authors on the subject of volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention were reviewed. The intention was to benchmark the best recruiting and retention practices of others in hopes of utilizing them in the Canton Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department.

The research questions to be answered in this paper are:

1. Why is the Town of Currently having difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteer fire fighters?
2. How are other communities across this country successfully recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighter?
3. Is it practical for the Town of Canton to attempt to maintain an all volunteer fire department?

All-volunteer fire departments are disappearing from many parts of this country, especially the Northeast. In these areas all-volunteer departments are being replaced by combination fire departments. This transition usually occurs for two main reasons, there have been drastic changes to the regions economic and societal make-up. Consequently, it becomes extremely difficult or impossible to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters.

The Town of Canton needs re-evaluate its commitment to recruiting and retaining an all-volunteer fire department. The Town of Canton has experienced drastic economic and societal changes in the past twenty years. Today the majority of the community's residents are White-collar professionals who neither the time nor the inclination to become volunteer firefighters. The Town should continue to maintain a volunteer fire department that is supplemented by small paid staff.

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INTRODUCTION

As we enter the 21st century the Town of Canton's volunteer fire department, like the volunteer fire departments of many similar communities across this country, is suffering from a shortage of volunteer firefighters. The Town of Canton has been protected by volunteer firefighters for over one hundred and fifty years and for the vast majority of this time Canton's volunteer fire departments have experienced little or no difficulty in recruiting and retaining firefighters, until recently. Despite their best efforts at recruiting and retention, for approximately the last ten to fifteen years Canton's volunteer fire departments have experienced a steady decline in the number of individuals willing to volunteer as firefighters.

This scenario became even more apparent when in 1994 the Town's Board of Selectmen commissioned the MMA Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct a study of the Town's volunteer fire services. The ultimate purpose of this study was to establish the outline of a strategic plan for the consolidation of the Town's three existing volunteer fire departments into the Town of Canton Fire and Rescue Department

The purpose of this research paper is to actually conduct the research portion of recommendation #21 of the study. Recommendation #21 states, “ *The Town of Canton Fire and Rescue Department should research, develop, and maintain a reasonable, workable, recruitment and retention program.*”

The paper will attempt to identify those elements that will be required for the Town of Canton to develop and maintain a reasonable, workable, recruitment program. This research project represents just a small portion of the Town of Canton's attempts to maintain its all-volunteer fire suppression force.

The research methods used for this project included historical, descriptive, and evaluative methodologies. The research questions to be answered include:

1. Why is the Town of Canton having difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteer fire fighters?
2. How are other communities across this country successfully recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighter?
3. Is it practical for the Town of Canton to attempt to maintain an all volunteer fire department?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

As part of the requirements for Executive Planning, a course offered at the National Fire Academy, a research paper based on a topic presented during the course is required. The topic of this paper relates to the following subjects covered in Executive Planning.

Environmental Monitoring

The nature and objectives of environmental monitoring are described in the manual for the National Fire Academy's *Executive Planning* course as follows (National Fire Academy [NFA], 1995).

Strategic Planning was a popular management tool of the late 1960's. At that time many private-sector organizations conducted strategic planning efforts. Unfortunately a large number of the early strategic plans failed to meet the organization's expectations. Research studies show these failures resulted from strategic teams failing

- To identify the most important areas to scan; and/or
- To use the data that were collected.

The planning team needs to have a thorough understanding of the current and the future work environments. Environmental monitoring provides information to the planning team and the organization about the future.

Initial environmental monitoring occurred when the team identified its organizational mandates and planning assumptions.

Pfeiffer, Goodstein , and Nolan list environments that need to be monitored: the macroenvironment, industrial environment, competitive environment, customer environment, and internal organizational environment. To this we have added environmental issues and social issues.

Environments to Monitor

The *Executive Planning* student manual (1995) went on to define the seven environments that had previously been identified as needing to be monitored.

- **Macroenvironment** - demographics, technology factors, economic factors, political factors.
- **Industrial environmental** – what legislative mandates apply; what products are being used.
- **Competitive environment** – identify competitors.
- **Customer environment** – tracking customer' complaints and their satisfactions.
- **Internal organizational environment** – the organizational structure, values, philosophy, culture, and demographics regarding personnel and organizational mandates.
- **Environmental issues** – issues that determine what kinds of responses we make and how we dispose of materials. Health and safety issues fall into this area.

- **Social environment** – ethics and diversity issues are included here.

In 1994 after much internal debate the Town of Canton's Board of Selectmen came to the realization that the current organizational structure of the Town's volunteer fire departments would not be adequate for providing the community's fire protection in the up coming century. In an effort to initiate a change in the Town's volunteer fire departments the Board of Selectmen contracted with MMA Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct a study of the Town's existing fire departments. The purpose of the study was to recommend how to transform the Town's existing three volunteer fire departments into the Town of Canton Fire and Rescue Department, while simultaneously attempting to maintain the all volunteer nature of the Town's fire department. The end result of the study was supposed to be a document that would lay the groundwork for a strategic plan that would improve the level of fire and rescue services the Town of Canton would be providing its citizens in the next century.

. Section IX of the study's final report identified the fact that the Town of Canton is facing a double struggle, due to a changing population and public apathy, when it comes to recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. Consequently, recommendation #21 of the study states, "*The Town of Canton Fire and Rescue Department should research, develop, and maintain a reasonable, workable, recruitment and retention program.*"

This recommendation relates directly to a number of the aspects of environmental monitoring a topic covered in the National Fire Academy's *Executive Planning* course.

The Town of Canton, which is made up of the villages of Canton, Canton Center, North Canton, and Collinsville, the Town has had its fire protection provided by all volunteer fire departments for over one hundred and fifty years.

The Town's first fire department was formed in the Collinsville section of Canton in the middle 1800's. At that time the village of Collinsville was built around the Collins Axe Company. Collinsville was a true 19th century company town, with the vast majority of the villages' structures being owned and operated by the Axe Company. When the Axe Company formed, the Collinsville Volunteer Fire Department staffing was not an issue. Almost every resident of the village was also an employee of the Axe Company; consequently they had a vested interest in belonging to the local volunteer fire department. They realized that by belonging to the fire department they would not only be able to protect the lives and property of their families and friends, but they would also be able to maintain the economic well being of the community. The village of Collinsville and the Collinsville Volunteer Fire Department continued to enjoy a built in manpower pool until mid-1960's when the Collins Axe Company closed its Collinsville factory and moved its production facility to South America. Even after the Axe Company relocated to South America the Collinsville Fire Department continued to enjoy an abundance of available manpower predominately due to the blue-collar nature of the community. This seemingly inexhaustible manpower pool continued until the 1980's.

Today the village of Collinsville retains the appearance of a nineteenth century New England mill town, and it exists today much as it did over one hundred years ago. The difference between Collinsville today and Collinsville one hundred years ago is the drastic change in the demographics of the village. Until the 1980's the majority of Collinsville's population were blue-collar workers, today the Village's population is predominantly made up of white-collar professionals who live in Collinsville but are employed out of town.

The Collinsville Volunteer Fire Department provided the Town's only fire protection until the early 1940's. At that time the Town gained two new volunteer fire departments; the North Canton Volunteer Fire Association and the Canton Volunteer Fire Company.

The North Canton Volunteer Fire Association began providing fire protection for the villages North Canton and Canton Center in 1944. These villages were beginning the transformation process from predominately agricultural communities made up of a number of dairy farms to the suburbs of Hartford, the State Capital. This transformation process accelerated over the next few years with the end of World War II and an influx of returning veterans.

The Canton Volunteer Fire Company began providing fire protection for the village Canton in 1944. The village of Canton, like the villages of North Canton and Canton Center, was in the process of being transformed from a rural/agricultural community to suburbia. By this time the Village of Canton was in the process of replacing the village of Collinsville as the economic center of the Town. This was in part due to the changing nature of the Town of Canton, service type businesses were slowly replacing manufacturing type businesses as the economic backbone of the Town.

Both the North Canton Volunteer Fire Association and the Canton Volunteer Fire Company enjoyed an abundant supply volunteer firefighters for many years. This was partly due to the economic makeup of the communities surrounding Canton. For many years the vast majority of Canton residents were employed in blue-collar jobs by such companies as Colt Firearms, Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, Hamilton Standard, and Kaman Aircraft. All these companies are located in communities surrounding Canton.

In the early 1980's this scenario began to change, in large part due to the changing economic make up of the area surrounding Canton. At this time Connecticut began to experience the loss of a large number of its' blue-collar manufacturing jobs, in large part due to cuts in defense spending. High-tech industries as well as the insurance industry slowly began to fill the economic niche being vacated by the defense industry. The result was that Connecticut's workforce was being transformed into a predominately white-collar, well-educated, commuter workforce. This is a group that has proven extremely difficult from which to recruit volunteer firefighters.

In 1990 in an effort to retain and recruit volunteer firefighters the Town of Canton instituted a pension plan. Existing members of the Town's three volunteer fire departments convinced members of the Town's Board of Selectmen that by establishing and funding a pension plan the Departments would be able to at least retain existing members, if not be able to attract new members.

In 1995 the Town of Canton's Board of Selectmen, acting on the recommendations of the study that they had commissioned the year before, consolidated the Towns three existing volunteer fire departments into the Canton Fire and Rescue Department. Although this was a positive move it did nothing to address the issue recruiting and retaining department members. The Town continued to recruit new members in the same manner it had for years; most by utilizing word of mouth and the reputation of the department. The Department has also attempted to use billboards and newspaper ads to attract new members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to establish a foundation of work by other authors and researchers in an effort to benchmark the requirements of an effective volunteer fire department retention and recruiting program.

The difficulty in retaining an all volunteer fire departments in 21st Century

Dr. John Granito (1995) in *The Fire Chiefs Handbook* wrote that,

As we move into the 21st century we may see four basic types of departments providing fire protection and other safety services to communities. Indeed we are seeing the beginning of these in the mid-1990s. The transition will be from generic types of fire departments, where the essential difference among departments is the salaried status of the firefighters, to organizations that will specialize in providing different service packages. The types of service provided will be determined by local needs, and the format for delivery – the type, size, and status of the department, plus its operating procedures – will be determined by available resources, both financial and human (p. 1142).

Granito (1995) broke fire departments into four types base on service areas: Rural Protection, Suburban and Ring-City Areas, Urban and Inner City Areas, and Special-Purpose Organizations. Of these four, two are applicable to the Town of Canton, the Rural type and the Suburban and Ring-City type.

Granito (1995) went onto indicate that cost-free volunteer fire department are quickly disappearing in some parts of this country, and that the use of combination fire departments, including those which employ both full-time and part-time personnel will

grow in the near future. This could become a significant event for many communities across America. Marinucci (1995) states that:

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) only an estimated 6 percent of the more than 30,000 fire departments in the United States are fully career. Approximately 94 percent of the fire departments use the services of volunteer members (volunteer shall mean firefighters who are not considered career or full-time employees, regardless of whether or not they receive compensation); 90 percent are mostly or exclusively volunteer (p. 905).

Managing Fire Services (1988, p. 420) reprinted Lindsey Grusons, April 19, 1987, *New York Times* article titled “Ranks of Volunteer Thinned by Changing Society” this article provides two excellent examples of why the ranks of this country’s volunteer fire departments are being thinned. Gruson wrote that, “In the Northeast, the problem has been exacerbated by the decline in the manufacturing industries. Blue-collar employees have traditionally been the heart of the volunteer departments in many communities”. She went on to identify how the nature of firefighting has changed with the following statement:

A popular pastime has evolved into an unpaid profession. Twenty years ago, volunteers had to do little more than sign up and pass a 12-hour first-aid course. Now many departments require recruits to undergo 110 hours of training (Gruson, 1988, p. 420).

Granito (1995) went on to elaborate on why the nature of this country’s volunteer fire departments has undergone such a drastic change in such a short period of time:

It appears, however, that the driving forces behind fire service change have more to do with finances and the general direction of society than with the tools of our trade. Our equipment and technology will continue to be very important, but their change value will relate quite directly to their ability to move us along in the direction set by tighter economy and a dynamic culture. Our society now emphasizes a broad spectrum of needs, ranging from more effective crime control to vastly improved schools. In the minds of many these supersede fire protection. Simply put, the fire service will be changed more by external forces-the way our world is moving, and less for instance, by an ever increasing ability to reach higher floors with aerial ladders, or work harder and longer inside burning buildings (p. 1131-1132).

Volunteer Fire Department Recruiting

Marinucci (1995, p. 906) defines recruiting as, “The process of attracting and evaluating potential candidates for the department. It includes all steps in the hiring process, beginning with advertising (both formal and informal), application, testing and selection.”

The *Fire Chiefs Handbook* summarized the importance of volunteer firefighter recruitment in the following manner:

No fire department can function or survive without adequate staffing. The most important responsibilities of volunteer, on-call, and combination departments are to recruit and retain qualified firefighters to provide the required service. There is a direct correlation between recruiting and retention, in that the reasons that

current members stay are very often because of the same benefits that attract potential recruits (Marinucci, 1995, p. 906)

Firehouse (1996) illustrated one method for recruiting volunteer firefighters in their article “Filling The Rolls”. The approach described in this article is being used throughout the state of New Jersey and has been duplicated in at least one other state. This program is based on four critical points:

1. Many residents may not be aware that volunteers provide their emergency services.
2. Where residents knew that volunteers performed these services, these residents were not aware that their help was needed in staffing the fire department, ambulance corps or rescue squad.
3. Volunteer departments can be difficult to contact in non-emergency situation. Except during emergencies and training sessions, volunteer fire stations typically are unattended and many don't even publish a non-emergency telephone number.
4. The youth of the community represent the future, including future volunteers. It is imperative to attract them and provide them with a way to give something back to their town.

In *The Future of Volunteer fire and Rescue Services: Taming the Dragon of Change*, Perkins and Benoit (1996, p.139), identify two methods of recruiting that volunteer fire departments are discouraged from using, the Church Model and the Sinking Ship Model. Perkins and Benoit went on to define these two models in the following manner:

The “Church Model” is one that simply does not work, but it is a model upon which volunteer departments can often find themselves relying. The heart of this

almost non-method goes something like this: “Given enough time, people in the community will realize how valuable the department is and will feel led by some spirit (sacred or otherwise) to join.” Furthermore, “perhaps even if we close our doors,” says the vicious (versus and virtuous) department, “the community will finally notice we need help.” Many churches use this recruitment method, hence its name. Of course, people cannot be counted on to realize the value of any group and very few will join an organization that expects them to join but does nothing by way of invitation. The results of this method can be blaming of the public for not recognizing the nearly sacred character of the volunteer department. This method of confronting the future has a self-destructive element.

Adopting the “Sinking Ship Model” is another tempting method to approach recruitment. One can recognize departments that use this strategy by the presence of a mobile sign with blinking light across the top and bright plastic letters spelling out “H-E-L-P V-O-L-U-N-T-E-E-R-S N-E-E-D-E-D.” The message really being received is that the department is like a sinking ship. Few want to come aboard.

Volunteer Fire Department Retention

In the *Fire Chiefs Handbook*, Marinucci (1995, p. 906), defines retention as, “Keeping personnel once they have been hired or enlisted.” He goes on to state that, “You need to establish a reasonable goal with respect to longevity before you can address the issue of retention. (How many years of service can be expected from each successful recruit?)” (p. 907).

Marinucci (1995, p. 912), states that, “Retaining and motivating a volunteer or on-call firefighter is no different than keeping and motivating any other employee”. He recommends considering the following programs as a way to show appreciation for a job well done.

- Department awards program.
- Recognition banquets
- Tax incentives.
- Length-of –service awards.
- Retirement benefits.
- Health insurance.
- Employee assistance programs.
- Social activities.
- Tuition reimbursement.
- Free use of public facilities.
- Longevity pay or bonuses.
- Disability insurance.
- Newsletter.

Marinucci (1995, p. 914), went on to caution, “While all of these programs and benefits can be considered incentives, probably the greatest incentive for people is to be treated fairly and with respect”.

Dr. Grantio in *The Fire Chiefs Handbook* noted the following with regard volunteer fire department recruitment and retention programs in rural areas:

In addition to the many volunteer recruitment and retention programs now used, the problems of recruiting and retaining volunteer will be eased in several other ways. First, more nonfirefighting volunteers will be used for a variety of jobs, from clerical work and public education to equipment maintenance, inspections, and training. “They also serve who don’t haul hose.” Second, legal, legislative, and OSHA provisions might be instituted to allow some rural townships employees to train for and participate in firefighting activities as part of their regular job assignments, rather than as volunteer department members. This might lead to some highway department pick-up trucks, for example, carrying firefighting gear, and some county vehicles carrying state-purchased skid loaded water tanks and pumps. This method of providing additional personnel, however, is extremely problematic because significant changes in federal and state legislation are necessary for implementation, in most if not all instances. Third, low-cost housing will be provided in or near some rural stations as an inducement to membership. Fourth, volunteers will be encouraged, rather than discouraged, to use the volunteer station to fix their personal vehicles, to work on personal hobbies, for some family and social events, and for such other activities as physical fitness training, where individuals are not likely to own the required equipment. This method of keeping at least a few volunteers at the station for longer periods of time provides, at those times, a quicker response. Retirement provisions, insurance coverage, and other economic enhancements are proving to be quite effective in attracting and retaining volunteers, and in some regions may

well prove to be the most effective magnet for volunteers who have strong demands on their time (p. 1143).

PROCEDURES

Research Methodology

The initial research for this paper was conducted at the Learning Resource Center (LRC) of the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland. The purpose of this research was to review the writing of this country's fire service experts on the topic of recruiting and retention of volunteer fire fighters. The LRC's computerized card catalog system was used to conduct a search of all published material within the LRC related to the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. This material included:

- Fire service periodicals and professional journals.
- Fire service text and reference books.
- The research papers of other NFA students.

The primary procedure used for the research of this paper was benchmarking. Benchmarking is a useful tool in the measurement, comparison and analysis of organizational performance (Walker, 1994). The practice of benchmarking has long been used by America's private sector to improve organizational practices. Benchmarking allows organizations to identify the best practices of other organizations and in turn adopt these best practices for use in their own organizations. One of the greatest benefits to the practice of benchmarking is that it allows an organization to engage in the practice of organizational change without having to reinvent the proverbial wheel.

It has recently been recognized that the practice of benchmarking which has worked so well for the private sector can be successfully applied to the fire service. The author

has been aware of the practice of benchmarking for several years. Consequently, once the literature review portion of this paper was complete and the author had identified the fact that there are already fire departments successfully engaged in the practice of retention and recruiting volunteer firefighter it became obvious to the author that benchmarking could be successfully applied to this project.

Assumptions and Limitations

During the research for this paper the author identified a number of assumptions and limitations regarding the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters in the Canton Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department.

It should be recognized that this research paper was inspired by the *Town of Canton (Connecticut) Final Report Relating to Fire Services* (1994) and that the research topic selected only establishes a base of information that can be used to meet the requirements of recommendation #21 of that study. It should also be recognized that there may be other factors that could limit the Town of Canton from successfully recruiting and retaining an all volunteer fire fighting force. In the opinion of this author the best way for the Town of Canton to determine what obstacles stand in the way of maintaining an all volunteer fire fighting force is to implement the recommendations of the *Final Report Relating to Fire Services*. The Town paid MMA Consulting Group, Inc. over fifteen thousand dollars for this study that establishes the outline of a strategic plan for the community's fire services.

This research project could have benefited from the use of two different survey or questionnaire instruments. The first would have been a survey of the EFO course being held at the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland between August 9 and 20,

1999. The second would be a survey of the current members of the Town of Canton Fire and Rescue Department. These survey instruments would have attempted to ascertain the following information:

1. Why do current members join the fire department?
2. What do current members like or don't like about the department?
3. What are the personal interests of current members of the department?
4. What do current members see as a meaningful incentive to stay with the department?
5. What do current members think the department could do to make volunteer services more enjoyable and rewarding?

The author believes these survey instruments could have benefited the overall results and recommendations of this research project. However, two significant obstacles prohibited the author from conducting these surveys in a manner that would have benefited this research project and the authors end goal of convincing the Town of Canton to adopt the recommendations of *The Town of Canton Final Report Relating to Fire Services* (1994).

The first obstacle is that the vast majority of students in the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer courses are career firefighters. The author recognized the fact career firefighters would answer these questions differently from volunteer. This eliminated a easily accessible pool of survey candidates that are often used by EFO students as part of their research project.

The second obstacle is that the author is the part-time, paid Fire Marshal for the Town of Canton and a career Company Officer in neighboring community. Although the author was a member of the Canton Volunteer Fire Company before becoming a career

firefighter, today many members of Canton's Volunteer fire and Rescue Department view him as an organizational outsider. This combined with the fact that *The Town of Canton Final Report Relating to Fire Services* (1994) recommended that the author become the Town of Canton's new Fire Chief did nothing to endear the author with many members of the Town's Volunteer Fire Departments. When the author selected the topic for this research project it was not his intention to identify problems or deficiencies in the organization, its leadership, or culture. Consequently, the author determined that although the lack of a survey instrument might handicap this research project to some extent, the overall benefit to the Town would be far greater by excluding the instrument.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

1. Why is the Town of Canton is currently having difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteer fire fighters?

Gruson (1988), provided part of the answer to this question in her article "Ranks Volunteer Thinned by Changing Society". In this article she identified the fact that Blue-collar workers have long been the backbone of volunteer fire departments in the Northeast and that with a decline in the manufacturing industry there has been an associated decline in the number of Blue-collar worker in many communities. The Town of Canton exemplifies this very scenario, it has changed from a predominately Blue-collar community to a White-collar community.

Dr. Granito (1995) went on to elaborate on this theory when note that societal values have changed. This change is in part due to the change in community make-up. A Blue

–collar community is going to have different societal values than a White-collar community.

2. How are other communities across this successfully recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighter?

In Firehouse, Naylis (1996), points out that many members of a community may not be aware that they are serviced by a Volunteer Fire department, and if they are they may not be aware that department is having a staffing shortage. He believes that departments need to get their passage out to the community in a positive manner.

Perkins and Benoit (1996), re-enforced this line of thinking when they identify two common methods of recruiting that volunteer fire departments are discouraged from using, the Church Model and the Sinking Ship Model. Both these methods convey their message in a negative manner.

Marinucci (1995), states that, “Retaining and motivating a volunteer or on-call firefighter is no different than keeping and motivating any other employee”. Consequently he recommends using the same types of rewards as another organization to recruit and retain members. These include providing health and life insurance, tuition reimbursement, and tax incentives.

3. Is it practical for the Town of Canton to attempt to maintain an all volunteer fire department?

Dr. Granito (1995) in *The Fire Chiefs Handbook* made several observations that are pertinent to this question. He identifies the fact that fire departments in future will be one of four types based on the community they serve. The Town of Canton’s volunteer fire department actually meets the requirements of two of these types the Rural and Ring-city.

Granito (1995) went onto indicate that due to the changing nature American society cost-free volunteer fire department are quickly disappearing in some parts of this country, and that the use of combination fire departments, including those which employ both full-time and part-time personnel will grow in the near future.

DISCUSSIONS/IMPLICATIONS

The study results appear to indicate that the all-volunteer fire department is no longer a practical way for many communities across America to provide fire protection. This is in large part due to the changing economic and societal make-up of these communities.

Many communities across the country are offering unique and innovative benefit packages in an effort to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. For those communities that are rural or Blue-collar in nature these incentives may reap some benefits. However, when you are dealing with a predominately up-scale, White-collar community the free use of public facilities and a recognition banquet will not fill the roles of your volunteer fire department. The Town of Canton currently has a very lucrative pension plan for its volunteer firefighters, but it has not done very much to fill the roles of the Town's volunteer fire department. The Town's other recruiting efforts have been more traditional, utilizing a modified SINKING SHIP method. The results of their effort were predictable.

It appears that of any of the literature reviewed for this paper the writings of Dr. Granito would have broadest appeal to communities across this country. You can not blame a municipality for attempting to maintain an all-volunteer fire department, if for no other reason than cost savings. Granito recognizes that America is changing both from an economic and a societal prospective. He realizes that for many communities across

this country a combination (part paid and part volunteer) department is going to be the answer to their fire protection needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To begin the Town's Board of Selectmen needs to come to the realization that the economic and societal make-up of Canton has changed. There are not enough residents with the time or desire for the Town to maintain an all-volunteer fire department. The type of families that are currently moving into Canton, and purchasing new \$400,000 and \$500,000 homes, are not the type of people who are going to volunteer to fight fires. Some do not even realize that their fire protection is provided by an all volunteer fire department.

It appears that it may be time for the Town of Canton to consider making the transformation to a combination fire department. At a minimum the Town should consider adding some paid personnel during the day. However, before the Town's Board of Selectmen makes any changes to the current structure of the volunteer fire department they need to inform the residents of Canton of the following information:

- The community's fire protection is provided by an all volunteer fire department.
- The fire department is currently having a staffing crisis.
- The fire department needs its residents to volunteer.
- If after a specified period of time the volunteer fire department is unable to meet its recruiting and retention goals they will have to consider pursuing an alternative delivery method such as a combination fire department.

This recommendation in no way should discourage the Town from actively recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters. Although the approach they take may have to be a

somewhat non-traditional one. Of the literature reviewed for this paper regarding recruiting of volunteer firefighters, Naylis (1996), had an excellent idea for filling the roles of volunteer fire departments. He recommends focusing part of your recruiting effort on the youth of the community. He believes the youth of the community represent the future, including future volunteers. It is imperative to attract them and provide them with a way to give something back to their town.

The Town of Canton could recruit volunteer firefighters from the local high school and community college. Today, many colleges grant credit for Firefighter I and II courses as well as Emergency Medical Technician courses. This fact alone might be sufficient for some young people to volunteer. The department could also approach the recruiting of young people from the prospective that they will be receiving training that could lead to a very rewarding career, either as a paid firefighter or paramedic.

The Board of Selectmen needs to realize that in 1994 they paid for the outline of a strategic plan when they contracted with MMA Consulting Group, Inc. to produce the *Final Report Relating to the Town of Canton Fire Services*. This research paper addresses only a portion of one of the report's recommendations, the report contained a total of 31 recommendations. The Board of Selectmen needs to be aware of two important issues that were identified during the research for this paper before any changes are made to Town's volunteer fire department. 1) The fire department needs to have a strategic plan, and 2) that there may be issues other than those identified in this research paper that are hampering the volunteer fire department's recruitment and retention efforts, such as department leadership.

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